

Writing an Editorial

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School Uniforms, the \$80 Million Boondoggle

INTRODUCTION

Background information

Last week, William C. Thompson Jr., the president of the New York City Board of Education, proposed “a mandatory uniform policy” for all public elementary schools in New York City. Later in the week, the schools chancellor and the mayor also jumped on the uniform bandwagon. But if enacted in New York, as proposed, the program could be a financial disaster.

Opinion statement

BODY/Second strongest reason Counterargument addressed

While some claim that uniforms would reduce students’ clothing expenses, each uniform would cost \$100 to \$200. The city would probably have to buy uniforms for families that can’t afford them. About 75 percent of the 550,000 students in New York’s elementary schools now qualify for the Federal free-lunch program. That’s more than 400,000 students. The cost of outfitting them in uniforms could exceed \$80 million.

Facts and statistics

Ethical appeal

That’s a hefty price to pay when school buildings are

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Strongest reason

crumbling from disrepair and teachers remain badly underpaid.

Advocates of uniforms say that uniforms have been successful in other school districts. However, most of the evidence is anecdotal and unreliable.

Example

Consider Long Beach, California. That school system has one of the oldest uniform programs, which has been praised for bringing about a dramatic drop in disciplinary problems. At the same time school uniforms were introduced, however, other, more traditional disciplinary measures, like having more teachers patrol hallways, also went into effect.

Ethical appeal

More positive initiatives like these will better promote discipline and academic success. More after-school programs, for example, may reduce youth violence. Internships in workplaces can bolster academic achievement. And the millions of dollars that Mr. Thompson wants to pump into uniforms could be used to repair school buildings, hire more teachers, and reduce class size.

CONCLUSION

Clothing remains an important means of self-expression

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Emotional appeal

for students—especially in a place as diverse as New York.

Restatement of
opinion

School uniforms would infringe on that freedom. But more
important, they would cost the city millions of dollars at a time
when schools are still being heated with coal furnaces.